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A
S E R M O N,

PREACHED BEFORE THE
OXFORD UNIVERSITY VOLUNTEERS,

AT THE
PRESENTATION OF THEIR COLOURS

BY THE
RIGHT HON. THE COUNTESS HARCOURT,
ON THURSDAY, JULY 5, 1798.

BY
THE REV. C. BLACKSTONE, A. M.
FELLOW OF NEW COLLEGE.

OXFORD:
SOLD BY J. COOKE;
AND BY MESSRS. RIVINGTONS, LONDON.
1798.



TO THE
RIGHT HON. THE COUNTESS HARCOURT,
THE FOLLOWING DISCOURSE,
HONOURED WITH HER APPROBATION,
AND PUBLISHED AT HER REQUEST,
IS RESPECTFULLY INSCRIBED

BY
HER MOST DEVOTED HUMBLE SERVANT

THE AUTHOR.

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NEHEMIAH IV. 14.

BE YE NOT AFRAID OF THEM: REMEMBER THE
LORD WHICH IS GREAT AND TERRIBLE, AND
FIGHT FOR YOUR BRETHREN, YOUR SONS
AND YOUR DAUGHTERS, YOUR WIVES AND
YOUR HOUSES.

SUCH was the animating language, in which the Jewish Governor addressed his countrymen, who were employed in rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem, and were in momentary expectation of an attack from their inveterate and relentless enemies! "Jerusalem the holy city" had begun once more "to put on her strength;" "the captive daughter of Sion had shaken herself from the dust:" an event this, which, as it was wholly unexpected by them, could not but be highly mortifying to the surrounding nations, who had contributed to her disgrace, and cruelly insulted her in her affliction. They therefore

therefore eagerly conspired against her, and secretly resolved on her destruction ! It was then that Nehemiah, animated at once with zeal for his religion, and a noble ardour for the welfare of his country, put arms into the hands of the nobles, the rulers, and the rest of the people ; and addressed them in the words of my text. He exhorted them not to be alarmed at the menaces of an insolent foe ; but to remember the wonderful interferences of God in favour of their forefathers, and the terrible vengeance, with which he had pursued those who had risen up against them. “ Be ye not “ afraid of them ; remember the Lord which is “ great and terrible.” But because there might be some amongst them, on whose minds the recollection of former favours would not so far operate, as to induce them to oppose their enemies to the last, he proceeds further to enforce this reflection also, that on the issue of the contest in which they were about to engage, depended the future happiness or misery of those, to whom they were bound by the tenderest

dearest ties of natural affection. "Fight," says he, "for your brethren, your sons and your daughters, your wives, and your houses!" His exhortation produced the desired effect: they seized their arms with alacrity, and prepared themselves manfully to resist their enemies; who, dismayed and confounded, were obliged to desist from their destructive designs.

I have dwelt thus particularly on the words just read to you, because I know not, that throughout the whole Scripture History any other passage can be found, which might with so much propriety and advantage be brought to your remembrance at such a time and on such an occasion as the present. I see before me a virtuous and honourable band, who have voluntarily come forward in defence of their country in this her hour of danger; and are proud to contribute their endeavours to repel the aggression, and crush the insolent designs of an inveterate and vindictive foe. We are not, it is true, in the same situation that the Jews were
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when Nehemiah undertook the administration of their affairs ; we have not yet (thanks be to God) we have not yet stooped under the yoke of captivity, or become a tributary province of the Great Nation. But to this miserable state of degradation must we, it is to be feared, be reduced, if our hearts are not determined, as the heart of one man, to resist to the utmost of our ability the artful intrigues and open attacks of an invading enemy.

We are fallen on perilous and momentous times : from every side great and unprecedented dangers threaten to overwhelm us : and our only hope, under favour of Heaven, our only chance of weathering the impending storm, is by a cordial and honest union of all for our mutual support and protection. The present is not the season for Englishmen to indulge their unfortunate propensity to party spirit and dissension. The question is not now what man, or what set of men, shall direct our affairs ; but whether we shall have any government at all which we
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can call our own; any constitution, independent of the will and caprice of a foreign power. Hitherto may we boast of having been a peculiarly favoured people; hitherto has our island exhibited such a display of glory and firmness, of power and greatness, of private happiness and public prosperity, as can scarce be paralleled in the annals of mankind. We have enjoyed for more than a century the blessings of a well-constituted government; not subject to the arbitrary will of an absolute monarch, but to mild and salutary laws of our own enacting; by which the welfare and security of every class of the community is equally consulted and provided for. To this system of rational liberty is added the free and uncontrouled exercise of a pure religion, equally exempt from the narrow principles of fanaticism, and the ostentatious vanity of superstition. Surely these are blessings worth preserving, worth contending for. They have raised at once the envy and hatred of our implacable enemies; and to overthrow them has long been, if not the avowed, yet the secret, object of all their machinations.

chinations. For some time indeed "their words were smoother than oil;" yet even then "had they war in their hearts:" but now, intoxicated with success, they have thrown aside the mask, have openly declared their intention of invading these kingdoms, and insolently proclaimed the great end they hope to accomplish thereby; viz. the utter destruction of our present happy constitution, civil and religious; inasmuch as they have declared its existence to be wholly incompatible with the safety and prosperity of their own Republic.

We have now therefore no alternative but war or slavery: every overture towards an accommodation with them, every attempt to treat on fair and equitable terms, has been rejected on their parts with insolence and disdain. Should we tamely submit to their demands, we may easily perceive what must be our lot from the treatment which other nations have experienced at their hands. Look at the situation to which they have reduced the once flourishing states of Belgium and of Holland.

Yet

Yet to these nations they professed themselves friendly, and declared that they entered their country only to deliver them from the yoke of bondage, and to dispense unto them the inestimable blessings of liberty. If then pillage and extortion, degradation and insult, are the portion of those whom they call their friends and allies; should their designs against these kingdoms be attended with success, what treatment must be expected by a people, whom they have distinguished by the appellation of their bitterest enemies? Rapacious and insatiable, the object of the French, like that of the Roman Republic, is universal dominion; like that too, they employ at once the engines of treachery and of force to accomplish their designs. Witness their perfidious and oppressive conduct towards the lesser states of Italy, and their unprovoked and unjustifiable attack on America; witness the deep-laid treachery with which they undermined, and the more than savage inhumanity with which they at last overturned the constitution of the deluded

Swiss. Unhappy Switzerland ! had but your sons cordially united for their mutual protection, they would not have beheld the desolation of your fields, and “ your fenced cities “ laid waste with the sword.” Ill-fated people ! had but your rulers attentively considered the scenes that were passing before them, and acted with alacrity and vigour ; they would not have become a dreadful warning to the rest of Europe, how they temporize with an intriguing foe, or place implicit confidence in the professions of a French Directory.

Happily for the security of these kingdoms, their designs have been long seen through ; and such provisions made for our defence, that had they ventured on a sudden and secret attack, they would not have found us wholly unprepared to meet them. But now, since they have openly avowed their intentions, such a noble spirit has pervaded all ranks, as must render our efforts against them irresistible, and secure to us the invaluable blessings of independence. In every district,

district, and in every town, associations have been formed for the purpose of frustrating their designs, by repelling their open attacks, and baffling their secret machinations. Even among these peaceful retirements, these sacred haunts of religion and of learning, hath the generous ardour of public spirit shone forth in a most conspicuous manner. This our University had long been remarkable for its firm and inviolable attachment to the British constitution: when that constitution appeared to be in danger, you her sons generously came forward in its defence, and nobly offered your personal services for its protection. The eagerness and spirit which were manifested on this occasion, reflect at once the highest honour personally on yourselves, and the greatest credit on this the place of your education. Nor let any over-anxious persons be alarmed, lest the introduction of an armed association into these seats of learning should be attended with the evil consequences of defeating the purposes for which they were intended by their pious and munificent founders.

ers. Arms and arts are not so much at variance with each other ; they have often jointly contributed to advance the reputation as well of states, as of individuals. Athens was at once the most warlike and most polished city of Greece ; and the united skill and learning of a Xenophon and a Cæsar of old, and of a Frederic and a Wolfe in latter times, will abundantly prove, that a consummate knowledge of, and indefatigable attention to, military affairs, are by no means incompatible with the more peaceful and elegant pursuits of literature. It is true, these seats were designed for the protection and cultivation of the more peaceful sciences, and for the advancement of religion and of learning ; and it is the duty of every member thereof to keep in view this design, and promote, as far as he is able, the great end of such magnificent institutions. But at the present alarming crisis, when we are menaced with instant invasion, when our very existence as an independent people is at stake, there is a duty incumbent on us all, paramount
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to every consideration, the bounden duty of supporting and defending our country, by cheerfully contributing towards the exigencies of the state, or by personal services, if our bodily strength will permit: and poor must be that man's spirit, and weak indeed the influence of natural affection on his mind, who can at such a time ignobly shrink from the task, and tamely take refuge under the shelter of academic retirement. We admire the state of excellence at which the arts and sciences arrived in Greece; we revere the works of her poets, her orators, and her historians; but it was the unconquerable patriotism of her heroes who fell at Thermopylæ, or conquered on the plains of Marathon, which rendered her name immortal, and commanded the enthusiastic applause of every succeeding generation.

Yet a few words more, and I have done. We are here assembled for the solemn purpose of receiving and consecrating those standards, round which you are to rally; and under the shadow of which you are, if necessary, to march
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into action: and may that all-powerful Being, who ordereth and disposeth of all human affairs, grant success to your undertakings; may He "to whom victory belongeth" protect you in the day of battle, and restore you with triumph to your grateful country! In the mean time let me seriously exhort you not to forget that God, "who hath done so great things for us already." A due observance of your religious duties can never be incompatible with your military character. Religion never can unnerve your arms, or unman your courage; nay, in the hour of peril, it will add fresh confidence to your souls, and recruit them when they are fainting. In a word, offer up your addresses to Heaven, and put your trust therein; so may you be assured, that amidst all the hardships you may undergo, all the dangers you may be exposed to, "though an host should be encamped against you, though war should arise against you;" yet "the Lord of Hosts will be with you, the God of Jacob will be your refuge."



